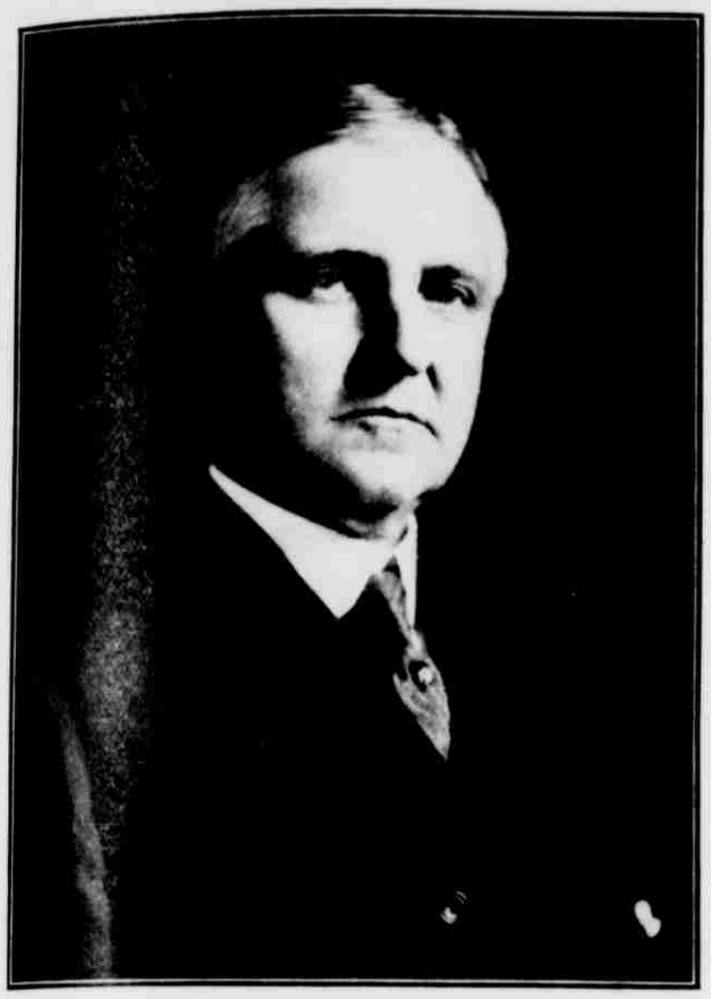
A Way to Relieve Traffic Congestion



CHAS P. CRAIG,

Executive Director, Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Tidewater Association.

By CHARLES P. CRAIG

LET'S GO, says the West. Let's open the road to the sea. We need more cargo space—we need more ships—more cars—deeper channels—more sailing room. The West has been bursting its breeching ever since anyone can remember. It has been crowding its transportation facilities as fast as they were furnished. Long ago the government put in fourteen-foot locks at the Soo and dredged a fourteen-foot channel from Lake Huron to Lake Erie, to accommodate the largest vessels on the lakes. Before the channel was done, bigger boats were built and went dragging on bottom. The channel was deepened to eighteen feet, to twenty, to something over twenty—during the last season of high water, close to twenty-two feet. The lakes built bigger and better boats, loaded them with heavier and heavier cargoes and sent them through the deeper channels still bumping on bottom.

The government put in a lock at the Soo too small for any use. It was obsolete before it was finished. A bigger lock was put in side by side with the first. Lake Commerce kept them both busy. Then a third, finally a fourth, and now the lake vessels are passing the Soo Canal by four gates, and during the busy season, treading on one another's heels to get through.

The East has done what it could to take care of this traffic. It has double tracked and four-tracked its railroads. It has struggled with its terminals. It has performed magnificent engineering feats. Boston drilled a tunnel through the Hoosac Mountains and said triumphantly, "There, that's done." New York dug a canal from Buffalo to the Hudson and said triumphantly, "There, that's done." Both are splendid undertakings but the products of the West would choke up the Hoosac tunnel so tight in a few minutes that you could not blast it out again in ten years. And if the West tried to force a small fraction of its tonnage through the Erie Canal, or its improved successor, it would freeze solid with the mass of traffic.

The West wants a broad road to the sea. Chicago, and Milwaukee, and Duluth, and Superior, and Detroit, and Cleveland, want to be able to load a boat with their products and start it on its way to the world's markets by continuous water passage. These lake ports would like to be ocean ports. It is a matter of national economy that they should be—but more of that later.

Seeking a road to the sea, the first thought was to enlarge the New York State Barge Canal. It once had four-foot channels, afterwards eight, now increased to an ultimate fourteen. But a fourteen-foot channel is no more help than a four-foot for carrying a lake vessel drawing twenty-feet. As the Waterway Commission said in 1900, "It is like a narrow gauge railroad connecting two through lines."

Unfortunately the Erie Canal would not do. Its own friends proved that it would not be economical. In addition to the high cost of digging a canal with twenty feet or more draft a distance of several hundred miles, and in addition to the very real difficulty of finding enough water to feed the summit levels, the friends of the canal proved to their satisfaction that a lake or ocean vessel, under the necessarily restricted speed of a canal—which cuts down the pace almost fifty per cent—could not compete with medium sized barges moving in a squad.

Attention necessarily turned then to the natural route by the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence, the original route by which the explorers penetrated the heart of the continent before the pilgrims had landed at Plymouth. It was the first road to the West, the first pathway of commerce before the railroads came. And now that the railroads are no longer equal to handling the giant production of the Mississippi Valley, commerce turns to it again. The distinction should be noted between such a waterway as the St. Lawrence and a canal. In the St. Lawrence, for most of the distance, vessels have clear sailing to go at full speed. In a few crowded thoroughfares, like the channels above and below Detroit, they must pick their way a little more carefully. Finally at the locks, or in the short canals—fifty miles or so out of two thousand miles inland voyage—they are restricted to the time of a confined channel. The canals in the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Route will be related to the voyage someting as the Suez is to the voyage from Boston to Bombay, or the Panama from New York to San Francisco.

As an engineering job, the St. Lawrence improvement is nothing to worry about. The most difficult part is to overcome the step of 326 feet from Lake Erie down to Lake Ontario past Niagara. But that difficulty is out of the way. Canada has undertaken that and has the job half done, with channels 25 feet deep and locks all ready for 30 foot channels if necessary.

The difficulty was that this undertaking had to be made by two governments, together, and that never had been done. Nations have frequently gone to war hand in hand but they never so far have co-operated in a project like this. In more conservative communities the fact that it never had been done was sufficient to dispose of the matter. But in the West—the West said, Let's go.

Congress was induced a year ago to write in the Rivers Harbors Act, a request that the International Joint Commission report upon the feasibility of this route and its possible advantages. That meant diplomatic procedure, and through the course of diplomatic procedure, marvelously accelerated in this instance, the two governments have come to an agreement to sit down at the same table to examine the facts and find a plan to fit them. It had to be done by the two governments together because part of the river runs along the international boundary and part is in Canada. The United States could not make any improvements in its part of the river without knowing whether they would be carried out through the Canadian river. Canada could not, under the existing treaty, interfere with the river along the boundary without coming to an agreement with the United States.

The diplomatic procedure was a necessary preliminary. That has gone by. The first stage—the diplomatic stage—has passed. The matter has been referred to the International Joint Commission consisting of three representatives of the United States and three Canadians appointed under the treaty of 1909. They are to investigate and report, and, if the improvement is found to be economical and advantageous, to recommend plans for construction, financial support, operation, and administration of the improvements.

Engineers for the two governments are at work now. Some of the things they will find, we know already from reports covering the same ground. They will find there is something like two-million horse-power running to waste in the international section of the river, and a similar quantity in the Canadian section. They will find without doubt, that the power will pay for the whole job.

The International Joint Commission, while it is waiting for the engineers' report which is due within a year, will pursue its inquiry as to the commerce that is ready for this route when opened, the resources that may be developed, and the advantages that can be shown. We know some of the conditions that will be reported to the Commission.

It will be shown that the improvements at the Soo saved, in the record year of 1918, not less than five times their cost. It will be shown that the St. Lawrence route will save in the movement of grain to the seaboard, not less than twenty-five millions a year. It will be shown that if, in such a crop season as this, ten per cent of our wheat had missed its market through inability to move the crop, the loss would be more than the entire cost of the improvement—and it will be shown that the danger of such a loss is real and imminent.

It will be shown—it has been shown and proved over and over—that the railroads cannot carry the load, and that by no possible improvements can railroad facilities be made equal to the situation. The seasonal movement of grain that comes rolling down the lakes and pours ashore at the foot of the lakes, is the last load that breaks the railroad's back. It flows in upon the dense traffic area east of the Alleghanies. Increasing their equipment will not save them. They have more box cars now than they can move in the busy season. The more they add the tighter the jam. To increase equipment and terminal facilities sufficient to avoid congestion would not save them—it would ruin them. They would be adding enormously to the investment in order to take care of the peak-load. They have not the money, they have not the credit, and if the credit was given them arbitrarily, so much of the investment would be idle for so large a part of the year that it would be a burden on freight rates and not a booster for earnings.

From the railroad standpoint the best thing that could happen would be the opening of the St. Lawrence route. Let the enormous bulk of western products move to the nearest lake port. Let the lake fleet carry seagoing cargoes not only half way to the ocean, but all the way, and to the other side if they are going across. If the lake vessels cannot move it fast enough, call in ships from all of the seven seas. The problem which the railroads then will face will not be impossible of solution.

From these facts reconstruct the situation. We have seen factories hampered in production because they could not get raw materials nor ship finished goods. What was the trouble? The equipment on eastern roads was all locked up in blockades and twenty per cent of the equipment on western roads had also been drawn into the jam. Julius H. Barnes of the Grain Corporation is authority for this statement. Further west crops were rotting in the fields because they could not be moved. What was the trouble—no cars. Where were the cars—locked up in the freight jam. What is the remedy—open the natural outlet and let commerce take its natural course.

Go a little further afield. We find in the Far West millions of fertile acres lying idle. For why—they are too remote from market. Crops that will easily move half way around the world by water can be carried a few hundred miles by rail before the profit is eaten up, and a still shorter distance by wagon. If you go up into the hills away from the railroad the pioneer leads a Robinson Crusoe existence, raising only as much as he eats. The nearer he gets to market the wider his range of production. When the Atlantic Ocean is brought to the heart of the continent by opening the sluiceway for commerce through the St. Lawrence, all the land west of the lakes as far as the Rocky Mountains will be moved a thousand miles nearer the world's markets.

Once the railroads outran settlement. They had to wait and suffer till production caught up with them. Now production has outgrown railroad capacity. Just as the channels connecting lake with lake have had to be widened and deepened over and over, so the whole transportation system between the lakes and the ocean will have to be enlarged. Not just stretched a little but radically rebuilt. What it needs now is a transportation system that will catch up with the needs of the country.

Is it any wonder then that those who have studied this most conceive that to link the lakes with the ocean will be to shift the center of gravity of civilization?

Some Facts About Ireland's Population

By DENIS L. O'CONNELL

Cork, Ireland, January, 1920.

THE surest sign that a country is well governed and prosperous is the growth in population. There is only one white man's country in the world where the white race decreases and on that showing Ireland's present government must not be suitable to the country. Compared with the other oppressed nationalities in Europe, Ireland's population figures give food for reflection. That Russia's Czar rule in Poland was alien, unjust and oppressive was obvious but despite that Russian Poland increased in people while Ireland decreased. The following table shows the respective populations between the years 1871 and 1915.

	Russian Poland	Ireland
1871	6,193,710	5,398,179
1881	7,319,980	5,145,770
1897	10,500,000	4,529,917
1912	12,776,100	4,384,710
1915	12,247,600	4,337,000

In other words, that while Russian Poland increased almost one hundred per cent in population in forty-five years, Ireland on the contrary lost 19.7 of its people. Had the population of Ireland increased in the ratio during that period Ireland would have within its shores in 1915 at least 10,675,000 instead of 4,337,000.

In the portion of Poland given to Germany to rule in the sixty-five years of from 1855 to 1910 the population grew from 1,392,636 to 2,099,831 or an increase of 50.8. The figures in Ireland had in the same time shrunk from 6,014,665 to 4,385,421. Yet under both Russian and German rule the Poles were dissatisfied with the government which they considered to be foreign and unjust. In the years between 1846 to 1913 the Poles living under the Dual Monarchy of the Hapsburgs increased from 4,461,400 to 8,211,770. The figures were almost the reverse in Ireland. In 1846 immediatly after the great famine Ireland's people counted 8,287,848 and in 1913 they only amounted to 4,379,076. All Poland is now free and the world has to consider how much greater would the Poles be today if they had developed their own country and people in their own way—in the way that was most suitable to their national requirements.

The Air Mail Service

THE United States Government maintained an air mail service since May 15, up to January 5, covering 473,210 miles. It advances the delivery of letters 16 hours.

The cost has been, daily between Washington and New York, $202,558; between New York and Cleveland, $112,296; between Cleveland and Chicago, $81,865.

The service has paid for itself. An effort is being made to take it out of the Civil Department and place it in the Military Department.

The cost to the government of rural route mail delivery is $66,031,487.

Schubert's "Serenade" was composed on the back of a soiled menu card in a small Vienna tavern amid the clatter of beer mugs, the chatter of the crowd, and while the air was heavy with smoke.